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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001209

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/18/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [PINR](#) [MCAP](#) [MARR](#)  
SUBJECT: MALIKI'S MILITARY OPERATION IN BASRAH: LESSONS  
LEARNED

REF: A. BASRAH 27  
[1](#)B. BASRAH 28  
[1](#)C. BASRAH 32  
[1](#)D. BAGHDAD 1151  
[1](#)E. BAGHDAD 1022

Classified By: POLITICAL-MILITARY MINISTER-COUNSELOR MARCIE B. RIES, RE  
ASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

This is a joint Embassy Baghdad - REO Basrah report.

[1](#)1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: Operation "Charge of the Knights" (OCK) - PM Maliki's campaign to wrest control of Basra from militias and criminals - demonstrated substantial deficiencies in Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) planning, logistics, command and control, individual loyalty and unit reliability. It also involved a miscalculation about the strength of Jaysh al-Mahdi's (JAM's) initial resistance. Yet the story also has some positive aspects. Gradually, with the help of U.S. and UK commanders, advisors, and airpower, the Iraqi Army (IA) and specialized police units demonstrated an ability to improvise in their own fashion and make notable inroads against the militias with the help of tribal forces. The Iraqis were also able quickly to move large numbers of their forces on their own. The Prime Minister and other civilian leaders have acknowledged the need for careful study of the lessons learned in Basrah as the military prepares for its upcoming push in Mosul. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) The details of Operation "Charge of the Knights" (OCK) - PM Maliki's campaign to wrest control of Basra from the Jaysh al-Mahdi militia and related criminal elements - have been recounted in REO Basrah and Embassy Baghdad cables (including refs A-D and previous), military channels, and open source reporting. Looking forward, we believe the Iraqi military leadership has generally taken a balanced view of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) performance - acknowledging deficiencies but seeking to learn from them in a redoubled effort to improve the ISF's capabilities. Among the problems identified:

[1](#)3. (S/NF) INADEQUATE PLANNING AND PREPARATION. Numerous Iraqi sources in Baghdad and Basrah - including the chief of staff of the National Operations Center (strictly protect) - have decried the lack of planning and rehearsal that preceded the launch of OCK. Fingers point at Maliki for undercutting his on-scene commander. According to National Security Advisor Rubaie (Ref E) and confirmed by U.S. and UK sources in Basrah, the Basrah military commander LTG Mohan had

devised a three-part plan to spend months "preparing the battlefield" through political and tribal engagement and economic development before moving into the city in July. He reportedly planned to use this time to run his Iraqi Army (IA) forces through week-long Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) training to prepare them for urban warfare. This plan fell apart when PM Maliki ordered his forces forward in late March.

¶4. (S/NF) COMMAND AND CONTROL DISARRAY. Maliki's decision on the first day of OCK to fire LTG Mohan - a decision rescinded shortly thereafter, reportedly at the behest of Defense Minister Abdul Qadr, only to be carried out in earnest two weeks later - contributed to confusion. (As of mid-April Mohan was reportedly still hanging on in Basrah although a successor has now been announced.) Military sources describe the Basrah Operations Center as lacking basic tools of command and control - no maps on the walls, secure radios available but not in use. Rather than communicating through his staff, Mohan relied on seven cell phones to pass orders directly to subordinate commanders.

¶5. (S/NF) LOYALTY AND RELIABILITY ISSUES. Iraqi commanders have acknowledged that as many as 3000 IP officers and IA soldiers were dismissed from the service in the course of OCK or thereafter for abandoning their posts, deserting to JAM, or acting on behalf of the enemy in Basrah (as well as in related fighting in other provinces). Notably, many of the IA who deserted were from a unit which came to Basrah straight from basic training, a lesson in itself. The commander of the Iraqi Counterterrorism Bureau told the PM's Ministerial Committee for National Security (MCNS) on April 13 (septel) that Iraqi Special Operations units had

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repeatedly confiscated cell phones from IP officers or detained IPs to keep them from providing JAM forces with intelligence about ISF movements and plans. The rapid fielding of several thousand tribal fighters as temporary police augmentees both reflected and accelerated the movement of tribal elements into the GoI camp. Some IA units - particularly inexperienced battalions rushed into the fight without embedded Military Transition Teams (MiTTs) - performed poorly. According to senior IA and IP commanders in Basrah, total OCK casualties through mid-April totalled 30-35 IA and 17 IP killed, and 400 IA and 259 IP wounded.

¶6. (S/NF) FIREPOWER DEFICIENCIES. Iraqi units still rely heavily on Coalition air and ground forces for fire support - not due to any failure, but because the multi-year U.S.-GoI plan for equipping the IA set out intentionally to build a primarily counterinsurgency (COIN)-focused light-infantry force, with more heavy armor, artillery, and close air support assets to come later. Maliki and other Iraqi leaders have praised the contribution to the fight made by Coalition attack helos and ground attack planes. (The role of airpower increased sharply after Maliki agreed to allow MiTTs, with their Air Liaison Officers, to support Iraqi troops in the field.) Iraqi airpower did contribute significantly to OCK, primarily in logistics and reconnaissance missions, but by April 13 Maliki was calling for the Iraqi Air Force to accelerate its development of a close air support capability of its own.

¶7. (S/NF) LOGISTICS SHORTCOMINGS. While some senior Iraqis have asserted that the ISF did an adequate job of staging supplies to Basrah Air Station and other logistical bases, other sources (including U.S. advisors) say the ISF performed poorly at pushing ammunition and food to front-line units. One Iraqi general in Baghdad attributed this in part to the JAM's ability to interdict road movement between the bases and the front. Some units complained of "starving" or running out of ammunition by day 3.

¶8. (S/NF) WINNING THE IRAQI WAY. All that said, by the first week in April the ISF had succeeded in overcoming initial

rebuffs to plant the flag in key sections of the city, then sweep into the vital Umm Qasr port area unopposed. In this regard it is important to note that U.S. and UK planners played an increasing role in shaping Iraqi planning and operations as the campaign progressed. The Iraqis also demonstrated a new strategic mobility capability, moving thousands of troops south from Baghdad and points north on their own. A renewed sweep - OCK II - in mid-April re-established government control of additional neighborhoods and demonstrated the ability of the IA and IP to recover from the disruption of the first stage of the campaign. Overall, the GoI has been able to portray the operation as a success for re-establishing governmental authority in large areas of the city that had been lost to the militias and criminals.

19. (S/NF) FACING HARD FACTS. Perhaps the most positive development of OCK is the willingness of senior political and military leaders to face up to the deficiencies of the ISF in Basrah, even as they counted the operations there as successful in weakening the hold of the militias. At the April 13 MCNS (septel), the PM and other senior officials emphasized the importance of a detailed, unit-by-unit review of unit performance and loyalty. We believe at least some commanders have drawn accurate conclusions about the need for better planning, training, rehearsal, and logistics. The next test of this proposition will come with the long-awaited Iraqi move to re-establish control of Mosul, an operation already in its preparatory phase.

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